PART V

Crops

Major Crops

The major part of the cropland in Thurston County is devoted to feed crops. Hay and silage, the main types of forage, take up well over two-thirds of all the harvested acreage. It is supplemented by oats, wheat and barley. Most of the hay and grain is used directly on the farms where raised or in the immediate locality to support dairy, general livestock and poultry farming. The 23,780 acres of harvested cropland enumerated in 1954 was planted to the following specified crops listed in order of acreage importance: clover-timothy hay and silage, oats, wheat and barley, tree fruits, berries and vegetables.

Hay and Silage Crops

Hay has been the largest crop for many years, being an essential part of dairying. Together with silage cut from the same acreage, the hay acreage has ranged from about 16,000 to 19,000 acres since 1940. In more recent years, clover and timothy hay in mixtures has become more important than oat and small

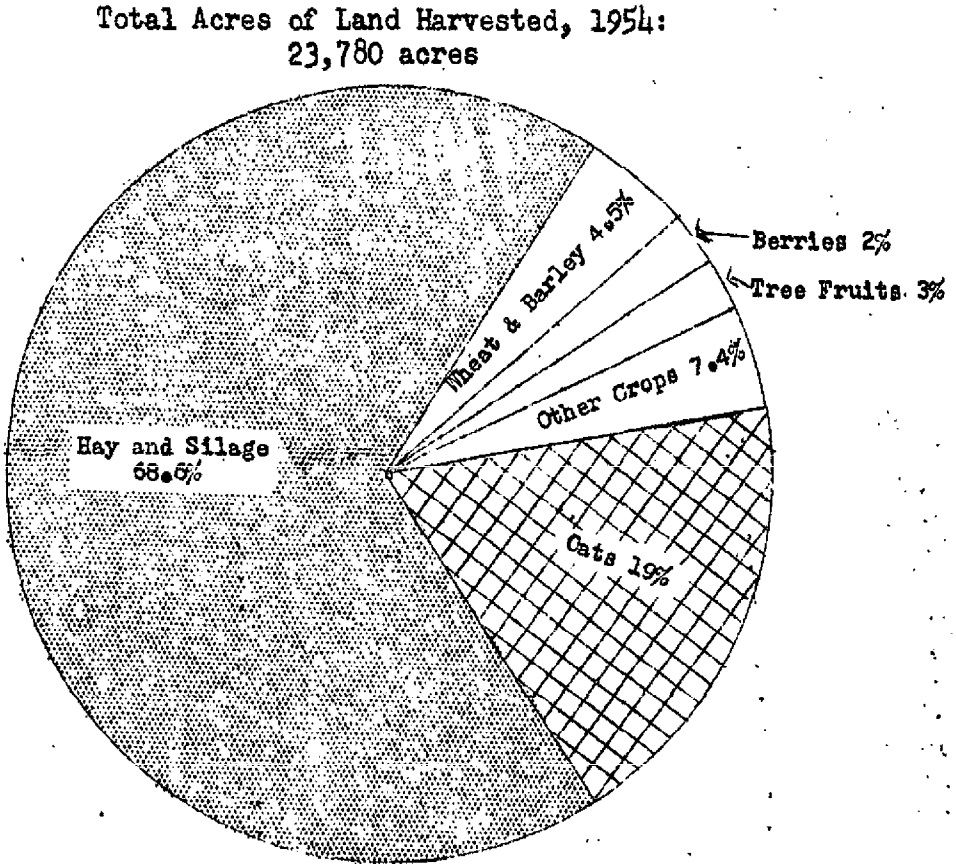

Figure 10.- Percent of Total Cropland in Leading Crops
Thurston County, 1954.
(Based on U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1954)

grain hay. Clover-timothy hay is grown on over 525 farms and in 1954 about 70 had a surplus for commercial sale. The acreage of this major feed crop went up from 3,300 acres in 1940 to a peak of 7,700 acres in 1954./ Small grain hay acreage (mainly green oats) has been diverted into clover and timothy. Grain hay has gone down from about 8,300 acres in 1939 to 2,000 in 1954. Alfalfa hay, grown on about 40 farms in 1954, has not changed greatly in the cropping system of Thurston County. Acreage was as low as 170 acres in 1947 and as high as 440 in 1953. Present acreage is about the same as in the early 1940's and most of it is in small fields. Wild hay, which is common in the prairie areas, has remained an important source of feed. In 1954 170 farm places had meadows of wild hay and the acreage cut was about 2,100, being greater than the 1,050 acres enumerated by the Census in 1939.

Silage cutting and storage is a recent and increasing practice. While statistics on silage are lacking prior to 1949, the two most recent censuses show a large expansion in the production of this type of feed. Converting grass and grain into silage provides a higher feed yield than hay and also reduces rain loss and damage which happens frequently in hay making in western Washington. Thurston County had 100 farms which put up silage in 1954 compared with only 26 in 1949. The acreage cut for silage reached 1,900 acres with production of 14,450 tons during 1954. In 1949 there were only 370 acres cut for silage and the production was only 1,550 tons.

Table 16.- Clover-Timothy Hay and Alfalfa Hay
Acreage, Yield and Production
Thurston County, 1939-1955

Year	Clover and Timothy Hay			Alfalfa Hay		
	Acreage (acres)	Yield (tons per acre)	Production (tons)	Acreage (acres)	Yield (tons per acre)	Production (tons)
1939	3,830	1.8	6,900	290	2.0	580
1940	3,300	2.2	7,400	320	3.0	960
1941	3,600	2.0	7,200	330	2.0	660
1942	3,800	2.2	8,200	220	2.4	760
1943	4,300	1.9	8,200	220	2.4	520
1944	4,840	2.0	9,600	180	2.7	490
1945	4,900	1.8	8,600	170	3.1	530
1946	4,800	1.9	8,900	180	2.7	490
1947	5,400	2.0	10,700	170	2.0	340
1948	5,800	2.0	11,600	260	2.5	640
1949	6,000	1.6	9,600	380	2.0	760
1950	5,900	1.3	7,600	380	2.2	840
1951	6,500	1.1	7,200	390	2.1	800
1952	7,800	1.8	14,000	390	2.1	830
1953	7,600	2.8	21,300	440	4.1	1,800
1954	7,700	1.8	13,900	330	3.0	990
1955	7,400	1.5	11,400	340	2.0	680

Source: U.S. Dept. of Agric., AMS, Estimates Division, State of Washington, 1939-1955.

Small Grains: Oats, Wheat, Barley and Field Corn

Small grains grown on the upland prairie soils for livestock and poultry feed have remained a common practice in Thurston County. Oats, wheat, barley and rye yield fairly well on the sandy and gravelly glacial soils of the rather extensive prairie areas to the south and east of Olympia. These grains were important and successful pioneer crops which have been continued by modern farmers.

Oats is the primary feed grain grown and over 3,500 acres has been raised each year since 1939. In 1953, the oat acreage was at a peak of 6,000 acres. This popular grain is widely distributed in numerous small fields, with over 210 farm places producing oats in 1954. Over 70,000 bushels were sold in local feed grain trading during 1954 but nearly 100,000 bushels were consumed by livestock on the farms where produced.

Wheat is the second feed grain in acreage. Winter wheat was grown by 58 farmers and spring wheat by 29 in 1954. Wheat acreage has ranged from a low of 300 acres in 1945 to as much as 1,290 acres in 1949. Yields have varied because of rainfall from 20 to as high as 37 bushels to the acre. About 75 percent of the wheat produced has been sold each with the other 25 percent going into feed and seed.

Barley has gained since 1939. Grown in small fields on about 20 farms it reached a peak of 250 acres in 1955. About 80 percent of the threshed barley is consumed as feed on the farms where grown. Corn is a minor field grain. In 1954 field corn was grown on less than 10 acres. During the mid-1940's there were 30 to 40 acres grown per year. Climatic and soil conditions are not favorable for corn to mature during the crop year. Most field corn grown in recent years has been cut green for silage. Harvesting and shelling of corn for animal and poultry feed grain has diminished.

Berries

Thurston County growers produce varied and important crops of commercial berries. In recent years about 160 growers have had a total of 400 to 600 acres under cultivation. Berry acreage by species has varied considerably in response to demands by processors and fresh markets. Most berries are in small fields on small part-time farms. Strawberries have varied greatly from as much as 1,200 acres in 1941 to as little as 80 in 1956. Caneberries (red and black raspberries) have also declined in recent years. Blueberries have been an increasingly popular crop; plantings increasing from 10 to 95 acres since 1943. Small commercial acreages of blackberries, currants and gooseberries are also grown.

Thurston County is more noted as a berry plant producing area. In recent years most of Washington's certified strawberry plant industry has been located in Thurston County. Berry plant growers produce planting stock which is sold widely over western Washington.

Table 17.- Oats and Barley: Acreage, Yield and Production
Thurston County, 1939-1955

Year	Oats (for grain)			Barley (for grain)		
	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)
1939	4,400	33.0	145,200	180	32.0	5,760
1940	4,300	27.0	116,100	180	28.3	5,100
1941	4,000	35.0	140,000	190	28.0	5,320
1942	4,300	35.0	150,500	210	29.0	6,090
1943	4,200	39.5	165,900	200	25.0	5,000
1944	4,450	33.0	146,850	190	24.0	4,560
1945	3,850	26.5	102,000	180	25.0	4,500
1946	3,630	32.0	116,200	150	33.0	4,950
1947	3,500	34.0	119,000	140	26.0	3,640
1948	4,000	25.0	100,000	160	29.0	4,640
1949	3,570	33.0	117,800	190	29.0	5,510
1950	3,480	32.0	111,400	200	29.0	5,800
1951	4,300	34.0	146,200	190	30.0	5,700
1952	6,000	46.0	276,000	170	28.0	4,760
1953	5,200	44.0	228,800	190	24.0	4,560
1954	4,600	36.0	165,600	220	23.0	5,060
1955	3,970	46.0	182,620	250	26.0	6,500

Source: U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division
State of Washington

Table 18.- Wheat and Corn: Acreage, Yield and Production
Thurston County, 1939-1955

Year	All Wheat			Field Corn (for grain)		
	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)
1939	560	25.1	14,060	10	42.0	420
1940	300	32.7	9,800	10	40.0	400
1941	450	34.0	15,300	10	39.0	390
1942	300	30.0	9,000	20	20.5	410
1943	340	23.8	8,100	30	21.0	630
1944	480	24.3	11,650	40	16.0	640
1945	300	25.3	7,600	30	34.0	1,020
1946	520	21.0	10,900	30	35.0	1,050
1947	400	24.0	9,600	20	35.0	700
1948	800	23.8	19,010	20	32.0	640
1949	1,290	19.7	25,360	20	18.0	360
1950	420	24.5	10,290	20	33.5	670
1951	730	24.8	18,090	10	18.0	180
1952	630	24.2	15,260	10	25.0	250
1953	640	37.6	24,050	---	---	---
1954	630	32.0	20,160	---	---	---
1955	500	32.5	16,270	---	---	---

Source: U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division
State of Washington

Table 19.- Berry Crops: Strawberries, Raspberries and Blueberries
Thurston County, 1940-1956

Year	Strawberries		Red Raspberries		Black Raspberries		Blueberries	
	Acres	Tons	Acres	Tons	Acres	Tons	Acres	Tons
1940	1,150	925	100	100	250	25-	10	10
1941	1,200	1,200	120	120	200	210	10	20
1942	900	850	150	155	150	165	10	20
1943	600	850	145	200	150	155	10	28
1944	200	325	100	200	100	100	11	27
1945	200	375	125	150	90	125	25	30
1946	250	425	250	350	145	250	29	30
1947	325	600	300	450	140	200	44	100
1948	375	750	350	525	130	150	45	90
1949	400	500	350	400	110	75	50	95
1950	400	600	200	185	125	125	40	90
1951	400	500	180	200	125	90	45	75
1952	450	850	170	340	125	100	45	80
1953	450	850	175	300	75	60	45	60
1954	250	400	125	300	75	50	45	100
1955	250	320	125	350	40	60	60	85
1956 1/	80	80	20	10	2	3	95	150

1/ Decline resulted from freeze damage in November 1955.

Source: U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division
State of Washington

Vegetables

Vegetable gardens are common in Thurston County. This is a popular practice on numerous part-time and non-commercial farms, as well as large commercial dairy farms. Commercial vegetable growing or truck-farming was reported on 44 farms in 1954 having declined in recent years. Truck farms numbered 90 in 1949 and commercial vegetable acreage was reported as 660 compared with 170 acres in 1954.

Table 20.- Commercial Vegetable Crops: Potatoes, Green Peas, Sweet Corn, Snap Beans and Cucumbers
Thurston County, 1948-1956

Year	Potatoes		Green Peas		Sweet Corn		Snap Beans		Cucumbers	
	Acres	Prod. (tons)	Acres	Prod. (tons)	Acres	Prod. (tons)	Acres	Prod. (tons)	Acres	Prod. (tons)
1948	100	550	60 1/	145	--	--	--	--	35	140
1949	120	650	290	350	--	--	--	--	35	130
1950	100	450	40 1/	95	10	50	5	10	10	95
1951	90	800	500 2/	550	10	60	10	35	10	90
1952	70	765	300 2/	400	15	45	10	30	10	50
1953	40	340	--	--	15	45	10	30	20	55
1954	40	340	35 1/	--	20	60	15	50	10	40
1955	150	1,500	--	--	15	75	40	160	20	100
1956	70	550	--	--	10	55	25	125	30	180

1/ Fresh market peas. 2/ Peas for processors.

Source: U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division
State of Washington

The most recent Census of Agriculture in 1954 reported a variety of commercial vegetable crops. Ranked in order of acreage importance they were: potatoes, green peas, snap beans, cucumbers and sweet corn. Most of the commercial vegetables go into fresh market outlets in Olympia, Fort Lewis and Tacoma. Cucumbers, mainly grown for processing in the Tacoma area, have been expanded recently. Green peas, once a rather large processing crop, have dropped off to a small acreage for fresh market. Commercial vegetables tend to vary considerably in acreage from year to year partly because of contracts.

Tree Fruits

Tree fruits are widely distributed over the county in small orchards. In 1954 there were 286 farm places with orchards of 20 trees or more but the acreage over the entire area amounted to only about 740 acres. Most fruit growing is not on a commercial basis. The most important commercial tree fruit grown is sour cherries followed by sweet cherries and some peaches. Recent trends in fruit show increased plantings of cherry and peach trees but plantings of apples, pears and plums have decreased. As older orchards of apples, pears and prunes die from old age, they are not replaced. In many instances, orchards are uprooted to make way for more profitable crops or suburban and rural home construction.

Table 21.- Bearing Fruit Trees and Filbert Trees
Thurston County, 1890-1954

Year	Numbers of Bearing Trees					
	Apples	Cherries	Peaches	Pears	Prunes & Plums	Filberts
1890	14,662	979	211	1,765	2,317	--
1900	52,019	2,014	213	3,544	23,741	--
1910	54,001	4,530	459	4,946	24,922	--
1920	38,870	8,056	292	8,171	11,302	--
1930	22,344	23,656	342	6,019	12,218	341
1940	17,322	20,228	454	3,874	9,298	5,239
1950	11,365	8,404	2,332	2,146	2,906	7,827
1954 1/	4,873	18,219	2,007	1,535	2,050	4,086

1/ 1954 figures are for trees in orchards of 20 trees or more.

Sources: Washington Tree Fruits, Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, USDA and Wash. State Dept. of Agric., Cooperating, 1952.
U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1954.

Field Seed Crops: Clover Seed

Raising commercial clover seed is an important minor specialty. Thurston County was seventh in the state in red clover seed production in 1954. Twelve farms were reported by the Census with a production of 18,075 pounds. Red clover seed acreage was as high as 332 acres in 1949 and as low as 21 in 1939. Alfalfa seed crops were harvested from 10 acres in 1949.

Table 22.- Clover and Alfalfa Seed
Thurston County, 1939-1954

Year	Clover Seed		Alfalfa Seed	
	Acres	Pounds of Seed	Acres	Pounds of Seed
1939	21	2,700	--	--
1944	53	2,760	--	--
1949	332	19,455	10	1,200
1954	125	18,075	--	--

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Horticultural Specialties: Plants, Flowers, Lavender, Mushrooms, Nursery Crops

A varied and highly valuable group of horticultural specialty crops are grown under intensive management in Thurston County. The nursery and greenhouse industry ranked eleventh in the state in 1954. In three specialties, however, Thurston led all Washington counties and even held high rank in the nation. These three crops were lavender, mushrooms and strawberry plant stock. In 1954 the Census valued the county's horticultural specialty production at an off-farm sale value of $160,315. The wholesale and retail value would more than double this value.

Table 23.- Horticultural Specialties: Nursery Products, Greenhouse Products, Flowers, Plants, Bulbs, Seeds, Mushrooms and other Special Plants
Thurston County, 1939-1954

Census Year	Nursery Products (shrubs, trees and ornamentals)		Flowers and flowering plants, bulbs and seeds; vegetables, vegetable seeds, plants, mushrooms grown in fields and under glass for sale.		
	Acres Planted	Sales from Nurseries	Acres in open fields	Greenhouse space (square feet under glass)	Sales from farms during the year
1939	30	$ 8,711	46	23,863	$ 17,646
1944 1/	--	--	--	--	--
1949	23	$74,861	17	43,950	$111,567
1954	96	$69,150	16	36,740	$ 91,165

1/ No Census data are available for 1944.

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Lavender is the specialty of one horticulturist who distills the flowers into lavender oil for the cosmetic and soap industry. This operation is reported to be the nation's largest lavender farm. This specialty crop is grown on the prairie east of Olympia, and the oil extract is marketed nationally.

Mushroom growing in sheds is a well-developed specialty in the Lacey district. This district's mushroom industry is the largest in the state and is reported as one of the largest in the United States. Mushrooms are grown in beds with two to three crops per year. They are packed for fresh and processor markets on the Pacific Coast.

Thurston County's prairie farm areas to the east and south of Olympia are noted over the state for certified strawberry, blueberry and raspberry planting stock. About a dozen growers of long experience specialize in these crops. Varieties of berry plants developed at Washington State College Experiment Stations are grown in large volume for direct sale to growers and to nursery stock wholesalers in the Pacific Northwest.